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Clement of Alexandria's Position on the Doctrine of Reincarnation and Some Comparisons with Philo

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Abstract

The balance of evidence available supports the conclusion that Clement of Alexandria endorsed the doctrine of reincarnation. He nowhere criticizes the tenet. Instead, he presents an undeniably positive evaluation of the doctrine. He quotes, without criticism, from within (and from passages close to) Plato's accounts of reincarnation, and he employs Plato's reincarnational language. In some passages, Clement probably on purpose gives the impression that he denounces the idea of reincarnation (or the pre-existence of the soul). However, reading him closely reveals other notions as the targets of his criticism. Reincarnation is in harmony with Clement's views of anthropology, ethics, God's punishments and salvation. There are significant points of contact with Philo's reincarnational thought. The lack of an explicit statement on the doctrine by Clement should be seen against the background that it is more plausible to assume he hid an approving rather than a rejecting stance.

1. Introduction

The goal of this essay is to present in a condensed form some of the major results of my research project on Clement of Alexandria's position on the doctrine of reincarnation.¹ Simultaneously to

¹ I gratefully acknowledge that the three-year project was funded by the Academy of Finland (decision nr. 294528 29.04.2016). I also thank the participants of the workshop on Clement at the 18th International Conference of Patristic Studies, held in Oxford in August 2019 – Ilaria Ramelli

writing this article I am also writing a monograph on the subject. Although that work is not yet completed, the overall picture has already emerged clear: the available evidence is much better accounted for by assuming Clement endorsed reincarnation than by supposing he did not.

The background of the project on Clement lies to a noteworthy degree in my findings on Philo of Alexandria's stance on reincarnation.² I found that stance to be one of endorsement, although the tenet is not something on which Philo wanted to write often and openly. In printed literature, Philo has been considered a supporter of the doctrine since the 1570s.³ I would call this the traditional view, questioned only in the 20th century, when scholars even began to speak of Philo's 'rejection' of reincarnation.⁴ In the end, of all the references to the question in scholarly literature, I found Zeller's to be the most accurate one: 'Only after the separation from the body do those souls that have kept themselves free from dependence on the body again attain the undisturbed enjoyment of their higher life. On these grounds, only the nous, without the lower powers of the soul, participates in this life. As seldom as he speaks of it, for the other souls Philo posits the prospect of the transmigration of the soul, which was the necessary consequence of his premises.'⁵

and Jonathan Young in particular – for their useful comments on the version of this paper prepared for the Conference.

² For a revised and shortened version of my doctoral thesis on the subject, see Sami Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo of Alexandria*, Studia Philonica Monographs 7 (Atlanta, 2015).

³ Azariah ben Moses de' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes: Translated from the Hebrew with an Introduction and Annotations by Joanna Weinberg*, Yale Judaica Series 31 (New Haven, 2001), 113. De' Rossi's work (*Me'or Enayim* in Hebrew) was originally published in Mantua in 1573–5).

⁴ See S. Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo* (2015), 15–29.

⁵ Eduard Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Hildesheim, 6th ed., 1963), 3.2.446, originally published during 1844–1852. My translation for 'Erst nach der

Philo's *locus classicus* on reincarnation is *Somn.* 1.138–9 where he speaks of souls who are 'lovers of the body (φιλοσώματοι) [and] descending to be fast bound in mortal bodies'.⁶ After being separated from the body at death, such souls, 'longing for the familiar and accustomed ways of mortal life, hurry back again' (παλινδρομοῦσιν αὐθις). The key driving force of reincarnation in Philo is the souls' love for the corporeal in general and the body in particular; in the main, his view is very Platonic. The major differences from Plato are three: (1) being born as an animal is not an option, since, according to Philo, animals lack the νοῦς – the real human being in his view; (2) the role of God's grace in salvation is more pronounced in Philo's synergistic soteriology; (3) the doctrine is more esoteric; although Plato placed most of his discussions of reincarnation in the mythical parts of his dialogues – the *Phaedo* being the most important exception – he, nevertheless, put it in plain sight.

Why investigate the same issue in Clement? There are some very good *a priori* reasons, which, it has to be emphasized, do not answer the question of what his position actually was. These reasons can be enumerated, *e.g.*, as follows: (1) Clement's Platonist orientation, which he probably held prior to becoming a Christian and which (in that case at least, and originally) very likely included a belief in reincarnation; (2) his appropriation and appreciation of Pythagorean and Philonic ideas; (3) the lack of an explicit statement concerning his own personal stance; (4) Clement's avowed

Trennung vom Leibe gelangen diejenigen Seelen, welche sich von der Anhänglichkeit an denselben frei erhalten haben, wieder zum ungestörten Genuss ihres höheren Lebens, an dem aus diesem Grunde nur der Nus, ohne die niederen Seelenkräfte, theilnimmt; den übrigen stellt Philo, so selten er auch davon redet, die Seelenwanderung in Aussicht, welche seine Voraussetzungen forderten.'

⁶ Translations from Philo are those in Loeb Classical Library with some modifications.

esotericism in the *Stromateis*;⁷ and finally, (5) the fact that he was accused by Patriarch Photius (*Bibl. cod.* 8) of endorsing the doctrine in the now lost *Hypotyposesis*.⁸

Clement's silence about his own position (point 3 above) merits some further comments. First, there is no scholarly consensus that it exists; instead, many researchers see Clement rejecting reincarnation (or the soul's pre-existence) in certain passages. However, I maintain that a close reading of Clement does not bring up a single case of rejection.⁹ Second, why am I arguing from this silence that it may reflect approval? While arguments from silence cannot be decisive, they may be valid in cases where 'we fail to find behavior that we would expect'.¹⁰ What one can reasonably 'expect' is a matter of debate, but the openly hostile comments on reincarnation by other Christian authors in the second century (most notably Irenaeus, *e.g.*, *Adv. haer.* 2.33 and Tertullian, *e.g.*, *De anima* 23) make it probable that Clement would not have been under external pressure to hide a rejecting stance but an approving one. We know that he did have a stance; he implies this in at least

⁷ *E.g.*, *Str.* 1.1.5: 'Sometimes [the Stromateis] will try ... to reveal something without uncovering it or to demonstrate it without saying anything'. The translations from *Str.* 1–3 are Ferguson's (in *The Fathers of the Church*) with occasional modifications.

⁸ These charges have been recently discussed by Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial: The Evidence of 'Heresy' from Photius' Bibliotheca*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 101 (Leiden, 2010) who devotes one chapter to reincarnation. His conclusion concerning the verity of the charge is diametrically opposed to mine.

⁹ It should be noted that, if need be, Clement had no difficulties in expressing a strong disapproval of others' views; see, *e.g.*, *Str.* 4.12.85.2, 7.14.88.5.

¹⁰ James R. Royse, 'Did Philo Publish His Works?', *SPhiloA* 25 (2013), 75–100, 84. Royse gives as a classical example from literature a passage from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Silver Blaze*, where Sherlock Holmes calls a dog's *not* barking when it should have a 'curious incident'.

two passages (*Str.* 3.3.13.3, 4.12.85.3). It is worth noting that on both occasions he says he will return to the matter, but he never does.

Philo and Clement, while differing in several ways, have in common the fact that the investigation of their position on reincarnation cannot rely solely on the rare statements about the fate of the wicked after death, or concerning the doctrine itself; in Philo's surviving works, we do not even have the latter. Thus, the student of the subject must, first of all, establish whether the tenet would have a niche in which to thrive in their thought. This means perusing, in particular, their anthropological, ethical, eschatological and soteriological views in order to assess if reincarnation is compatible or incompatible with their thinking. Both authors hid their truest thoughts on the tenet, but I argue that they did not want to hide them so well that they cannot be found.

I approach the question of what Clement's position on reincarnation was through what I understand to be the core of the scientific principle: *theories that cannot explain our observations must be abandoned*. This is fully applicable in historical research as well, for although we cannot carry out experiments on historical matters, we do make observations concerning our historical research data. In terms of methodology, my main method is the close reading of the source materials and their intertextual, tradition-historical, philosophical and linguistic analysis.

What follows is a series of short presentations of selected aspects of the problem. Such a concise presentation as this is by necessity quite 'Stromatean' in its 'passing constantly from one thing to another' (*Str.* 4.2.4.1). It is difficult, in an article, to adequately summarize the argument of a book, especially of one that has not yet been fully written. I cannot analyse all of Clement's references to reincarnation,¹¹ and several complicated questions are discussed below much more briefly than they deserve. Here I can only refer to my forthcoming monograph.

¹¹ The clearest references are found in *Str.* 3.3.13; 4.12.83, 88; 5.14.91; 6.2.24; 6.4.35; 7.6.32; and *Exc.* 28.

2. The Evidence

I begin this brief discussion of the evidence with Clement's clearest evaluation of the tenet of reincarnation and continue by discussing one of his techniques of concealment as well as his views on the soul's pre-existence, the body, resurrection, the world, the passions, the prerequisites of and the alternative to salvation, punishments after death, the roles of Christ and divine grace.

Among the Best Doctrines

Clement's most explicit appraisal of the doctrine of reincarnation reads as follows:

We could find also another proof for validating the boasting (αὐχεῖν) of the best philosophers (τοὺς ἀρίστους τῶν φιλοσόφων) to have appropriated (σφετερισμένους) from us the best doctrines (τὰ κάλλιστα τῶν δογμάτων) as their own (ὡς ἴδια): the gathering not only from the other barbarians some things which contribute to each sect, but in particular [from] Egyptians both other things and the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul (τὴν μετενσωμάτωσιν τῆς ψυχῆς δόγμα). (*Str.* 6.4.35.1)¹²

In this remarkable statement, Clement singles out reincarnation as an example of the best doctrines that the best philosophers have stolen from the non-Greeks – in this case, ostensibly from the Egyptians. He characterises the tenet with the superlative of the adjective καλός, which means 'beautiful', 'good', 'fair', 'noble' *etc.*¹³ Even if this represents the philosophers' self-assessment concerning which of their doctrines are the best ones,¹⁴ the evaluation concerning the philosophers

¹² My translation.

¹³ LSJ.

¹⁴ As suggested by Ilaria Ramelli in her response to the first version of this paper.

themselves as ‘best’ – the term now being ἄριστος, which serves as the superlative of ἀγαθός – is Clement’s own. Although the description of the doctrine is indirect, it remains, however, a positive one. The passage cannot be taken to reflect a negative or even neutral attitude towards the doctrine of reincarnation.

Nevertheless, even here Clement refrains from explicitly stating whether he considers the doctrine to be true. Can we infer what he thinks? We know that Clement thought the Greek had ‘true doctrines’ (ἀληθῆ τινα δογματίζειν, *Str.* 1.19.91.1), and they ‘delivered a slice of true philosophy (τινα τῆς ἀληθοῦς φιλοσοφίας)’ (*Str.* 1.19.94.1).¹⁵ An assumption that one of their ‘best’ doctrines is not among the true ones would need to be argued for. However, there is no doubt that philosophy is not enough in Clement’s thought. It has its place as ‘preparatory education for the gnostic’, but it is not indispensable (*Str.* 1.20.99.1). Philosophy, ‘on its own, did bring the Greeks to righteousness, though not to perfect righteousness’ (99.3).

Reading on, we encounter a close parallel to the above passage from book six. In *Str.* 1.20.100.4–5, Clement criticizes the Greek philosophers’ plagiarism using almost identical terminology: ‘Once again, he is unjust who appropriates ideas from barbarians and proudly puts them forward as one’s own (ὁ σφετερισάμενος τὰ βαρβάρων καὶ ὡς ἴδια αὐχῶν), puffing up one’s own reputation and playing false with the truth’. Clement does not mention any particular doctrine, but something precious is clearly implied to have been stolen. A specific tenet is mentioned in another parallel, in *Str.* 6.2, where too Clement mentions ‘the selfish plagiarism of the Greeks, and how they claim (σφετερίζονται) the discovery of the best of their doctrines (τῶν παρ’ αὐτοῖς καλλίστων δογμάτων),

¹⁵ In the section *Str.* 1.19.91–4, with its quotations from the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, Plato clearly acts as the yardstick of acceptable philosophy. Among Plato’s dialogues the *Phaedo* is the most explicitly reincarnational one. The tenet is there intimately linked to the main theme, the immortality of the soul.

which they have received from us' (*i.e.*, from the 'barbarians') (6.2.27.5). Here, the tenet given as an example is close, and its provenance identical, to that mentioned in 6.4.35.1: 'From Pythagoras Plato derived the immortality of the soul (τὴν ψυχὴν ἀθάνατον εἶναι); and he from the Egyptians' (6.2.27.2). There are also further parallels.¹⁶

Reading these passages together seems manifestly warranted: although their scopes vary in terms of the doctrines explicated, Clement shows consistency through concentrating on Plato and Pythagoras and the Egyptian origin of their tenets. It is also noteworthy that in all the passages where the ideas appropriated are explicitly extolled, there is a reference to a claim by the philosophers themselves.¹⁷

Str. 6.4.35.1 is, however, exceptional in two respects. First, Clement's openness in evaluating the tenet of reincarnation is not matched anywhere in his surviving writings. Second, I have found only one scholarly comment on Clement's evaluation of the doctrine in this passage. Theodor Zahn mentions it as one of the two passages (along with *Str.* 4.12.85.3) to support his conclusion that, in spite of rejecting reincarnation, Clement did find the doctrine 'very much worth consideration'.¹⁸

¹⁶ In *Str.* 1.15.66.3, Clement writes, 'Plato does not deny importing from abroad (ἐμπορεύεσθαι) the best parts into his philosophy (τὰ κάλλιστα εἰς φιλοσοφίαν), and admits a visit to Egypt'. A little later, in 1.16.68.2, we read, 'Plato's continual respect for non-Greeks is clearly revealed: he recalls that he, like Pythagoras, learned the majority of his finest theories (τὰ πλεῖστα καὶ γενναιότατα τῶν δογμάτων) among foreigners (ἐν βαρβάροις)'.

¹⁷ I cannot in the present context delve into the question of how to decide if this reflects Clement's intention to distance himself from the tenets praised, or his desire to make his own endorsement thereof a little more difficult to detect.

¹⁸ *I.e.*, 'sehr der Erwägung werth'. Theodor Zahn, *Supplementum Clementinum*, Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altchristlichen Literatur 3 (Erlangen, 1884), 143.

The only things on which other scholars have commented are the (implausible) Egyptian origin of the tenet and the Greeks' alleged tendency to plagiarize.¹⁹

This passage is the crowning example of the kind of evidence that a theory of Clement's rejection of reincarnation is unable to explain. And yet *Str.* 6.4.35.1 alone comes nowhere near being *the* answer to the main question concerning Clement's position on reincarnation. It is a single passage in a work that essentially only survives in a single manuscript.²⁰ Moreover, as it locates reincarnation in a history-of-ideas context, it does not show how reincarnation ties up with Clement's thought more broadly.

Pre-existence and Concealment

In book 4 of *Str.*, we find a passage that has a bearing on Clement's thought in several areas. It is also one that has been used by several scholars to deny Clement's belief in one of the key

¹⁹ Alexander Alexakis, 'Was There Life beyond the Life Beyond? Byzantine Ideas on Reincarnation and Final Restoration', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001), 155–77, 159; P. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Trial* (2019), 122; Guillaume Ducoeur, 'Palingénésie indienne et métempsomatose basilidienne chez Clément d'Alexandrie (*Stromates* 3.7 et 4.12)', in Guillaume Ducoeur and Claire Muckensturm-Pouille (eds), *La transmigration des âmes en Grèce et en Inde anciennes* (Besançon, 2016), 93–105, 98–9; and (on plagiarism) Jean Daniélou, *Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes avant Nicée: 2, Message évangélique et culture hellénistique aux IIe et IIIe siècles* (Tournai, 1961), 64, 70–1. Herodotus's report (2.123) that the Egyptians were the first to believe in reincarnation is usually considered to be without foundation.

²⁰ The manuscript containing *Str.* can be viewed online at <http://teca.bmlonline.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=TECA0000612530&keywords=Plut>.05.03.

prerequisites of reincarnation, the pre-existence of the soul.²¹ The broader context is the relationship between the soul and the body, and this is what Clement says: ‘The soul is not, then, sent here down from heaven to what is worse. For God works all things up to what is better. But the soul which has chosen the best life – the life that is from God and righteousness – exchanges earth for heaven’ (*Str.* 4.26.167.4).²²

This is an example of a phenomenon I have encountered in at least two other passages: Clement couples reincarnation or pre-existence with some other notion that he then proceeds to denounce – creating (at least for some of his readers) the impression he rejects them *both*, even though the link between the ideas is not inevitable. In *Str.* 4.26, the actual target of criticism is the idea that God could be the cause of any kind of deterioration. No, says Clement, God ‘works all things up to what is better’. I see this passage in the context of Clement’s repeated affirmations that this world is good

²¹ Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria: Being the Bampton Lectures of the Year 1886* (Oxford, 1913), 107; Jean Hering, *Étude sur la doctrine de la chute et de la préexistence des âmes* (Paris, 1923), 31; A. Knauber, ‘Die patrologische Schätzung des Clemens von Alexandrien bis zu seinem neuerlichen Bekanntwerden durch die ersten Druckeditionen des 16. Jahrhunderts’, in Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (eds), *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster, 1970), 280–308, 302; Peter Lee, ‘Reincarnation and the Christian Tradition’, *The Modern Churchman* 23 (1980), 103–17, 108; Monika Recinová, ‘Clement’s Angelological Doctrines: Between Jewish Models and Philosophic-Religious Streams of Late Antiquity’, in Matyáš Havrda, Vit Hušek and Jana Plátová (eds) *Seventh Book of the Stromateis: Proceedings of the Colloquium on Clement of Alexandria (Olomouc, October 21-23, 2010)*, VigChrSup 117 (Leiden, 2012), 94–111, 97.

²² The translations from *Str.* 4–7 and *Ecl.* are Wilson’s in ANF (with modifications). See *Str.* 3.14.94.2–3 for a similar thought.

and that ending up here is not a terrible thing (*i.e.*, birth is not evil), but even a cause for thankfulness (*Str.* 4.26.166.1). However, we should bless our departure, ‘receiving with great joy the dwelling place in heaven’ (*ibid.*). Put simply, earth is good but heaven better.

In a similar fashion, reincarnation is contingently linked with the ideas – the real objects of Clement’s disapproval – that martyrdom is a punishment (*Str.* 4.12.83.2) and that reincarnation is a valid reason for vegetarianism (*Str.* 7.6.32.8). The fault with the former idea is that since becoming a martyr is dependent on one’s own choice, it cannot be providential – and a punishment should be just that. Clement in no way comments on the idea, which he attributes to Basilides, that there are sins of previous lives. The latter idea, reincarnation as a reason for vegetarianism, would make no sense for Clement, as there are no hints that he accepted the possibility that a human soul could be born in an animal body. In *Str.* 7.6, he is speaking of the Pythagoreans’ ‘dreaming (ὄνειροπολοῦντες) about the confinement of the soul in another body’. In its only other occurrence in Clement (*Paed.* 2.10.106), the verb ὄνειροπολέω (‘to dream’) clearly has the implied meaning, ‘to have a wrong conception of’, and since this would make perfect sense in *Str.* 7.6.32.8 as well, the claim that Clement here ‘openly rejects’ reincarnation is highly problematic.²³

To take one more example, let us turn to *Str.* 3.13.93.3: ‘But our brilliant friend takes a more Platonic view (ἡγεῖται δὲ ὁ γενναῖος οὗτος Πλατωνικώτερον) and says the soul is divine in origin and has come from above to our world of birth and decay after being made effeminate by desire’. The man in question is Julius Cassian, whose interpretation of a passage in an apocryphal gospel Clement is assessing. He uses a threefold μέν–δέ–δέ structure; the cited statement is under the second δέ and thus represents a counterpoint to the previous one about the interpretation of the gospel passage: there Cassian is wrong – he ‘does not seem to recognize’ what Clement thinks is

²³ The quotation is from Jennifer Otto, ‘Philo, Judaeus? A Re-Evaluation of Why Clement Calls Philo “the Pythagorean”’, *SPhiloA* 25 (2013), 115–38, 123.

the correct understanding (3.3.93.1–2) – but here he is ‘more Platonic’. Given Clement’s appreciation of Plato and his acceptance of pre-existence elsewhere, the most plausible interpretation of ‘more Platonic’ is ‘more correct’. No criticism of the idea of the soul’s pre-existence is thus present.

The Body and Resurrection

In research literature, one of the things often emphasized in connection with reincarnation or some of its anthropological prerequisites in Clement is the appreciation he shows for the body.²⁴ I concede that his attitude is more positive than Philo’s, but what are the implications of this for

²⁴ E.g., Peter Karavites, *Evil, Freedom, and the Road to Perfection in Clement of Alexandria*, VigChrSup 43 (Leiden, 1999), 94: ‘Clement disliked the doctrine of transmigration as expressed by some philosophers. Transmigration implied that the soul was connected to the body simply for purification and punishment and that the body as material was evil, a theory that Clement rejected’. For similar statements, without an explicit reference to reincarnation, see, e.g., J. Daniélou, *Histoire* (1961), 376; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Shape of Death: Life, Death, and Immortality in the Early Fathers* (New York, 1961), 141; John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford, 2000), 141; Martin Pujiula, *Körper und christliche Lebensweise: Clemens von Alexandria und sein Paidagogos* (Berlin, 2006), 150. It should be noted that Karavites does not give an entirely accurate picture of typical reincarnational beliefs prior or contemporaneous to Clement. In neither Plato nor Philo are purification and punishment *original* reasons for the soul’s connection with a body. For Philo (with occasional references to Plato), see S. Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo* (2015), 44–81.

reincarnation?²⁵ To make a long story very short, the crucial question becomes: does Clement attach the body an ultimate value on a par with the soul? *A priori* this would be quite a feat for a Platonist.²⁶ In other words, does Clement affirm ‘the final value of the human person as a unique composite of body and soul’?²⁷ Does he say or imply that the human soul has a special, eschatological, relationship with one, and just one, physical body? He nowhere does.

Instead, it is quite clear Clement subscribes to both the soul’s pre- and post-existence in a way that means that the body is not part of the human being in any ultimate sense. He calls the body a ‘dwelling’ (*Str.* 4.26.163.2), a ‘shell’ (citing Plato without comment at *Str.* 5.14.138.3), an ‘earthly garment’ (*Dives* 3.5), a ‘tomb’ (citing Plato and Philolaus without comment at *Str.* 3.3.16) and a

²⁵ It should be noted that not even in Philo is the body evil *per se*. It is comparable to the physical world: the soul’s quest for liberation takes place in and from them. Only when Philo superimposes the dichotomy of good and evil onto the simplified anthropology of soul and body (ignoring the former’s internal structure) does he call the body evil. See *ibid.* 39–40.

²⁶ I am not using the term ‘Platonist’ to define Clement in an essentialising sense, but as a general characterization of his philosophical orientation. He shares the Platonic two-tier worldview where the physical body unavoidably belongs to the lower sphere of constant change and impermanence. See, *e.g.*, *Str.* 5.1.7.5: ‘For, bound in this earthly body, we apprehend the objects of sense by means of the body; but we grasp intellectual objects by means of the logical faculty itself. But if one expects to apprehend all things by the senses, he has fallen far from the truth. Spiritually, therefore, the apostle writes respecting the knowledge of God, “For now we see as through a glass, but then face to face” (1*Cor.* 13:12). For the vision of the truth is given but to few’.

²⁷ Bradley Malkovsky, ‘Belief in Reincarnation and Some Unresolved Questions in Catholic Eschatology’, *Religions* 8.9 (2017), 1–11, 3 (speaking of Christianity in general), the lack of this value being ‘the problem with ... reincarnation teaching, from the Christian point of view.’

means to enter ‘the universal school’ of the world (*Dives* 33.6). The later dogma of the resurrection of the body is incompatible with Clement’s thought on anthropological grounds; the flesh is excluded from resurrection: ‘Then how can [those who claim to have already attained the state of resurrection] hunger and thirst and suffer (πάσχουσι) the flesh and all the other things which the person who has attained through Christ the fullness of the expected resurrection will not suffer (οὐ πείσεται)?’ (*Str.* 3.6.48.1-2).

According to my observations, the term resurrection (ἀνάστασις) means several different things in Clement: an improvement in a general sense (*Protr.* 8.80) or as related to sanctification (*Paed.* 2.4.41.4, Clement’s only reference to the ‘resurrection of the flesh’),²⁸ the resuscitation of a dead body (*Paed.* 1.2.6.3), and a release from the body and the world. This last use is visible, *e.g.*, in *Paed.* 1.6.28–9 where ‘after our departure from here’ is implied to be synonymous with ‘after the resurrection’.

Although I do not think there are references to a belief in the resurrection of the body in Clement (a concept Philo never even hints at), there are some intriguing passages where he might be thought to approach the idea. *E.g.*, in *Paed.* 1.9.84 he writes: ‘The all-holy Shepherd and Guide, the almighty Word of the Father ... wills to heal/save (σῶσαι) my body by clothing it with the cloak of immortality’. Heal or save? In order not to argue in circles by appealing to Clement’s Platonic

²⁸ Based on the partial parallel in *Str.* 7.14.87.2–88.3 and for reasons I will have to elaborate in my monograph, I take ‘the resurrection of the flesh’ in *Paed.* 2.4.41.4 as a reference to the improvement of the most ‘fleshly’ type of Christians. It should be noted that Clement never speaks of ‘the resurrection of the body’ *pace*, *e.g.*, Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1991), 46; M. Recinová, ‘Angelological’ (2012), 109–10. The former refers to *Paed.* 1.6.28.3–5, the latter also to *Dives* 42.15–6. Neither passage mentions the body.

orientation, I base my preference of the translation ‘heal’ on what Clement says twice just a little before, in 1.9.83: ‘We need the Saviour (σωτήρ) because we are sick (νοσοῦντες) in our lives from the reprehensible lusts’. This, I believe, represents the healing, sanctification and even resurrection that concerns the body: using it free from the passions. Another example: ‘Those who serve the heavenly court, that of the King of all, sanctify the flesh, the untainted garment of the soul, and clothe it with incorruption’ (*Paed.* 2.10.109.3).²⁹ There is no eschatology here: all the verbs are in the present tense; ‘incorruption’ refers to this earthly life and has an *ethical* content.³⁰ This is easy to see when we compare the passage to *Paed.* 2.10.100.2–3 where Clement interprets Paul’s statement in 1 *Cor.* 15:53 (putting on incorruption) as learning self-control in this life with the result that ‘we are living’ (διώκομεν, present tense again) a life like that of angels.

Clement shares Philo’s ideal of alienation from this world, although perhaps in a somewhat milder form.³¹ In *Str.* 4.13.94.2–3, he sets out his view in a lucid manner. He first exposes the wrong way of thinking: ‘the things desired are [not] alien in the way those suppose who teach that the creator is different from the first God, nor because birth is abominable and evil. For such opinions are impious’. He then tells his readers the real reason: ‘But we say that the things of the world are alien, not as if they were foul, nor as if they did not belong to God, the Lord of the universe, but because we do not remain with them for ever’.

²⁹ Translations from *Paed.* are Wood’s in *The Fathers of the Church* with occasional modifications.

³⁰ See meanings I.3 (e.g., ‘corrupt’, ‘pervert’) and II.3 (‘to be morally corrupted’) of φθείρω in LSJ.

³¹ See, e.g., *Conf.* 77–82 where Philo explains how ‘all whom Moses calls wise are represented as sojourners’ in the Pentateuch: Abraham, Jacob and Isaac were merely visiting a world that was not their true fatherland. Moses himself goes even further: ‘His tenancy of the body is not to him merely that of the foreigner as immigrant settlers count it. To alienate himself from it, never to count it as his own is, he holds, to give it its due.’

Things physical (including the body) are useful in this world: ‘The things that the Aristotelians maintain to be the three goods, those [the elect one] uses, including the body, like someone sent far away from home uses inns and the houses by the way’ (*Str.* 4.26.166.1).³² An intriguing question is if the plurals ‘inns and houses’ are an allusion to *several* bodies.³³ Be that as it may, the ‘inns and houses’ possess only an instrumental value for the traveler. In Clement’s ethos we should not become attached to them, desire them and have passion for them, if we want to be saved. Clement writes in *Str.* 6.14.108.4-109.1: ‘So that when we hear, “Your faith has saved you”, we do not understand him to say absolutely that those who have believed in any way whatever shall be saved, unless also works follow. ... No one, then, can be a believer and at the same time be licentious; and though he quit the flesh, he must put off the passions, so as to be capable of reaching his own mansion’.³⁴ Getting rid of the body will not be enough, because if we have passions left, we cannot

³² My tr. for Ὅσα δὲ τριττὰ εἶναι ἀγαθὰ οἱ Περιπατητικοὶ θέλουσι, χρῆται αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ σώματι, ὥς τις μακρὰν στελλόμενος ἀποδημίαν πανδοχείοις καὶ ταῖς παρ’ ὁδὸν οἰκήσεσιν. Wilson’s rendering is problematic: ‘He makes use of the things which the Pythagoreans make out to be the threefold good things. The body, too, as one sent on a distant pilgrimage, uses inns and dwellings by the way’. He confuses the Peripatetics with the Pythagoreans and makes the body a guest in inns, whereas it is itself an inn.

³³ A factor in favour of an affirmative answer is that as the three goods meant are those of the soul, of the body, and external goods (see, *e.g.*, Aristotle, *EN* 1098b13–5), the metaphor of ‘someone being sent far away from home’ cannot concern all of them (for Clement would not present the goods of the soul as instrumental), but the body specifically.

³⁴ Stählin prints in his main text an emendation by Mayor: ἀλλὰ καὶ <μὴ> ἐξέλθῃ τὴν σάρκα, and appeals to *Str.* 6.9.75.3. Granted, there the gnostic ‘has withdrawn his soul from the passions’ before death, but that is hardly compelling. More importantly, to what kind of situation could the expression ‘though he does *not* quit the flesh’ refer? It is certainly not synonymous with ‘even while

be saved. This is reminiscent of how Philo speaks of the mind's inability to shed the lower parts of the soul along with the body at death as something that will lead to another incarnation (παλιγγενεσία, *Cher.* 114).³⁵

The Fate of the Wicked Souls

What, then, is the alternative to salvation in Clement? Both he and Philo are quite reticent when it comes to the afterlife. They do agree that there will be punishments for the wicked.³⁶ Ramelli has argued that we can discern the idea of universal salvation or *apokatastasis* in Clement and that the punishments he envisages are remedial.³⁷ I think this is accurate.³⁸ But Clement never details the

being alive'; the aorist ἐξέλθη points to a sudden event, not a state. This would be understandable if, say, the possible consequences of an illness were being discussed, but there is nothing in the context that would make the emendation sensible, let alone necessary.

³⁵ My interpretation of the passage, based on the analysis in S. Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo* (2015), 150–67.

³⁶ For Philo, see, e.g., *Praem.* 69: 'For people think that death is the termination of punishment but in the divine court it is hardly the beginning'. Yet he denies the existence of a mythical underworld, taking Hades and Tartarus as references to the life of the wicked soul in the body (*Congr.* 57, 59; *QG* 4.234, *QE* 2.40).

³⁷ Ilaria Ramelli, 'Stromateis VII and Clement's Hints at the Theory of Apokatastasis', in M. Havrda, V. Hušek and J. Plátová, *The Seventh Book* (2012), 244–5; *ead.*, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, VigChrSup 120 (Leiden, 2013), 119–36.

³⁸ See, e.g., *Str.* 6.6.46.3 where Clement adopts the view that 'all who believe shall be saved, although they may be of the Gentiles, on making their profession there; since God's punishments

punishments *post mortem*. He more than once refers to them with the help of Greek thought in a way that can be interpreted to allude to reincarnation. In *Str.* 5.14.90–1 he once again returns to the theme of the Greeks’ ‘pilfer[ing ideas] from the barbarian philosophy’, and now says this about ‘punishments after death’ and ‘penal retribution by fire’. His proof texts come from the reincarnational, concluding myth of Plato’s *Republic*. He first quotes from and compares 615e–616a³⁹ with Ps 104:1 (LXX 103:1), and then continues: ‘Well, did not Plato know of the rivers of fire and the depth of the earth, and Tartarus ... introducing such corrective tortures for discipline? ... He shrinks not from writing, “When all the souls had chosen their lives, according to the draw they approached Lachesis in order and she gave each the daimon they had chosen to escort them as protector through their lives and as fulfiller of their choices” (*Rep.* 620d-e⁴⁰) (*Str.* 5.14.91.2–4)’.

Here Clement quotes from Plato part of an explicit description the process of reincarnation – without comment. Had he considered reincarnation a ‘dangerous virus’,⁴¹ we would be left

are saving and disciplinary, leading to conversion, and choosing rather the repentance than the death of a sinner; and especially since souls, although darkened by passions, when released from their bodies, are able to perceive more clearly, because of their being no longer obstructed by the paltry flesh’. See also *Str.* 7.10.56.3.

³⁹ The section deals with the prevention of the incurably wicked souls from emerging from the underworld and proceeding to reincarnation.

⁴⁰ Trans. Emlyn-Jones & Preddy in Loeb Classical Library.

⁴¹ P. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Trial* (2010), 162. This is his general characterization of the things of which Photius accused Clement. Ashwin-Siejkowski notes the ‘absence of criticism’ of reincarnation in Clement (p. 120), but he nevertheless considers it proven that ‘Clement did not subscribe to the theory of incarnation (sic) in any shape or form’ (p. 123).

wondering why he utters no word of criticism; indeed, why he quotes such a passage in the first place.

A similar case meets us in *Str.* 4.7.44. Clement chastises those who do not understand martyrdom for ‘not knowing that such a gate of death is the beginning of the true life; and they will understand neither the honours after death, which belong to those who have lived holily (ὁσίως βεβιωκότων, from *Phaedo* 113d, 114b), nor the punishments of those who have lived unrighteously and impurely’. He again brings up the agreement between ‘our scriptures’ and Greek thinkers, first quoting the Pythagorean Theano (fr. 201 Thesleff) to the effect that the wicked would be lucky if the soul was not immortal. He then cites Plato’s words in the *Phaedo*: “‘For if death were release from everything” and so forth. We are not then to think according to the Telephus of Aeschylus “that a single path leads to Hades”’. The first quotation comes from 107c, the second, from 108a. What Clement’s ‘and so forth’ represents contains one of the dialogue’s direct references to reincarnation: ‘another guide conveys [the souls of the dead] back here after many long periods of time’ (107e). In my estimation, this at the very least amounts to flirting with the idea of reincarnation – for, surely, Clement had to reckon with the possibility that some, if not most people, in his audience knew the dialogue and the contents of the omitted text. Why did he not try to influence the conclusions that such people would draw? He could easily have remarked something like ‘After some nonsense, Plato continues ...’

In both Plato and Philo, reincarnation is often portrayed as a result of the soul’s desires. The soul gets what it wants – another chance to mix with things corporeal and to enjoy sense pleasures. In this respect *Dives* 16.3–17.1 is quite interesting. Clement juxtaposes two attitudes towards riches. The right one makes its possessor ‘a ready inheritor of the kingdom of heaven’. The worse alternative is this:

He who carries his wealth in his soul, and in place of God’s spirit carries in his heart gold or an estate, who is always extending his possession without limit, and is continually on the lookout for more, whose eyes are turned downwards and who is

fettered by the snares of the world, who ‘is earth’ and destined to ‘depart to earth’ (*Gen.* 3:19) – how can he desire and meditate on the kingdom of heaven? A man that bears about not a heart, but an estate or a mine, will he not perforce be found among these things on which he fixed his choice (ἐν τούτοις εὐρεθησόμενος ἐπάναγκες [ἐν] οἷς εἴλετο)? ‘For where the mind of a man is, there is his treasure also’ (*Matt.* 6:21/*Luke* 12:34). (*Dives* 17.1)⁴²

Clement seems to be describing two alternative fates in the afterlife: inheriting heaven or being forced among one’s objects of desire: riches.⁴³ In my view, the punishment of the worldly soul, ending up among riches, is very awkward – except as a description of what happens to it in its next life: its ‘slave[ry to] its possessions’ (*Dives* 16.3) will continue and it will ‘hardly enter the kingdom’ (18.1).⁴⁴ In this context, it is warranted to note Philo’s exegesis of *Gen.* 3:19 in *QG* 1.51 and especially *Leg.* 3.252–3. In answering the question of what it means for the *soul* to return to earth, Philo invokes what I have termed the ‘corporealization of the mind’: the νοῦς becomes so corporeally orientated that it is ‘ranked with things earthly and incohesive’ (*Leg.* 3.252). It is striking that Clement, like Philo, restricts the ‘departing to earth’ to apply to the wicked souls only, which is not very easy to understand without assuming reincarnation. Philo reinforces the presence

⁴² Trans. Butterworth in Loeb Classical Library.

⁴³ In my view, the afterlife is implied by two factors: (1) Inheriting the kingdom of heaven can fully take place only after death, and, perhaps more importantly, (2) the context of *Gen* 3:19 is physical death.

⁴⁴ The impact of the soul’s inclinations on its following embodiment is a standard feature of the Platonic reincarnation scheme. See, *e.g.*, *Republic* 620a: ‘For the majority of choices [of next lives; see the quotation at n. 40] were made through familiarity with their previous existence’. On this theme in Plato and Philo, see S. Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo* (2015), 139–40.

of reincarnation by quoting the biblical text in a form that is more naturally interpreted to mean that the deplorable existence of the fool lasts *as long as*, rather than until, he returns to earth.⁴⁵

Christ and Grace

If souls atone for their own sins by undergoing curative punishments, how does Clement see the significance of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus? Christ actually has several roles: a teacher (*Ecl.* 5–6) and a healer (*Paed.* 1.2.6), a model (*Str.* 7.12.72, *Protr.* 1.7), a mediator of God’s power (*Str.* 7.12.79), awarder of the prizes in the struggle against the passions (*Str.* 7.3.20) – and a *saviour*. His saving function seems to be related to his life (rather than his death), and the role of a model is prominent:

As for us, O children of a good Father, flock of a good Educator, let us fulfill the will of the Father, let us obey the Word, and let us be molded by the truly saving life of the Saviour (τὸν σωτήριον ὄντως ἀναμαζώμεθα τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν βίον). Then, since we shall already be living the life of heaven which makes us divine, let us anoint ourselves with the never-failing oil of gladness, the incorruptible oil of good odor. We possess an unmistakable model of incorruptibility in the life of the Lord (ὑπόδειγμα ἀφθαρσίας τὴν πολιτείαν ἔχοντες τοῦ κυρίου) and are following in the footsteps of God. (*Paed.* 1.12.98.3)

⁴⁵ For *QG* 1.51 and *Leg.* 3.252–3, see *ibid.* 70–9, and for Philo’s soteriological interpretation of the Paradise story more broadly, Sami Yli-Karjanmaa, “‘Call Him Earth’: On Philo’s Allegorization of Adam in the *Legum Allegoriae*” in Antti Laato and Lotta Valve (eds), *Adam and Eve Story in the Hebrew Bible and in Ancient Jewish Writings Including the New Testament*, Studies in the Reception History of the Bible 7 (Turku and Winona Lake, 2016), 253–93.

If Jesus' death and resurrection had a crucial soteriological significance for Clement, it is not very easy to understand why he left it out here. There are, however, also references in Clement to the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. *E.g.*, in *Ecl.* 20 he writes: 'Now the Lord "with precious blood (τιμίῳ αἵματι)" (*1Pet.* 1:19) redeems (ἀγοράζει) us, freeing us from our old bitter masters, that is, our sins, on account of which "the spiritual powers of wickedness" (*Eph.* 6:2) ruled over us. Accordingly he leads (ἄγει) us into the liberty of the Father – sons that are co-heirs and friends'. It is noteworthy that Clement again uses the present tense (to describe an ongoing process), in contrast to his referent in *1Pet.* 1:18–9: 'You know that you were ransomed (ἐλυτρώθητε) from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors ... with the precious blood (τιμίῳ αἵματι) of Christ'.⁴⁶ Clement explicitly quotes these verses (and 4:3) in *Paed.* 3.12.85 and explains them through another symbol of Jesus's death: 'Let us have (ἔχωμεν) the cross of the Lord as our boundary line by which we are fenced around and shut off (περισταυρούμεθα καὶ περιθριγκούμεθα) from our former sins'.⁴⁷ Jesus' death has a significance for Clement, but it seems related to the ethical question of how we should live in this world.

In *Paed.* 1.3.7.1 Clement does invest Christ with powers that no doubt contribute to salvation: 'Both as God and as man, the Lord renders us every kind of service and assistance. As God, He forgives sin; as man, He educates us to avoid sin completely'. However, forgiving sins is not the same as atoning for them – a sinner could be acquitted in a trial before 'the judgment seat of Christ' (*2Cor.*

⁴⁶ Trans. NRSV.

⁴⁷ In *Str.* 2.20.108–9 Clement says much the same thing, first citing Plato (*Phaedo* 83d) as saying, 'each pleasure and pain ... pins the soul to the body' and specifying that this happens to the one 'who has not separated and fenced off (ἀποσταυροῦντος) himself from the passions'. He proceeds to urge his audience to be 'willing to release, detach and separate (which is what the cross means) your soul from merriment and pleasure in this life.'

5:10, cited at *Str.* 3.8.62.1). I have not managed to find references in Clement to the idea of a once-and-for-all atonement by Christ.

Divine grace and reincarnation are not mutually exclusive ideas in the context of a synergistic soteriology.⁴⁸ In *Str.* 7.7.42.4–7, Clement explains his ideas about the human contribution to salvation: ‘Nor shall he who is saved be saved against his will, for he is not inanimate; but he will above all voluntarily and of free choice speed (σπεύσει) to salvation. Wherefore also man received the commandments in order that he might be self-impelled (ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὁρμητικός), to whatever he wished of things to be chosen and to be avoided’. In *Str.* 6.12.96.2, Clement even goes as far as saying: ‘For it is of great importance in regard to virtue to be made fit for its attainment. And it is intended that we should be saved by ourselves.’ That this is, nevertheless, not the whole picture is made clear by passages like *Str.* 3.7.57.1–2: ‘Our idea of self-control is freedom from desire. It is not a matter of having desires and holding out against them, but actually of mastering desire by self-control. It is not possible to acquire this form of self-control except by the grace of God’.

Conclusion

I think Photius was correct in considering Clement a believer in reincarnation. Moreover, I think he would have been able to reach this conclusion even without the *Hypotyposes*, as the above evidence, mainly taken from the *Stromateis* and the *Paedagogus*, in my opinion, shows. That evidence includes an undeniably positive evaluation of the doctrine, citations from within, and from passages close to, Plato’s accounts of reincarnation and the use of reincarnational language – and all this without any criticism of the tenet. In a few passages, Clement does seem to want to give the

⁴⁸ See Philo, *Ebr.* 145: ‘For without divine grace it is impossible either to abandon the ranks of mortal things, or to remain steadily and constantly with those which are immortal’.

impression that he denounces reincarnation, but a close reading reveals that the real objects of his censure lie elsewhere. This supports the hypothesis that his position on reincarnation, one that he clearly has but is reluctant to openly express, is a positive and not a negative one. Furthermore, his silence is understandable given the contemporary rejection of the doctrine by other Christian authors.

The idea of human souls gradually, in several lives, reach the state of being able to be saved by God is in harmony with Clement's anthropology, even though his dualism is milder than Plato's or Philo's: the body and the world are good things, but getting out of them is even better. The key ethical goal in Clement of ridding oneself of the passions as a prerequisite of salvation also fits reincarnation thinking seamlessly. The same applies to his understanding of God's punishments as corrective and to his universalistic soteriology.